

## RUSSIA AND THE WEST IN IRAN

regions would entail effort and expense that might better be avoided. As the British viewed it, then, an independent Iran, free from all foreign influences, was to be preferred to an Iran under the shared domination of Britain and Russia. This view, for reasons of European policy, had to be temporarily pushed into the background in 1907, but it was never totally abandoned.

An illustration of the British worry over undue southward extension of Russian influence in Iran may be found in the attitude adopted by Great Britain in 1915 during the negotiations concerning Constantinople. These negotiations, resulting in the so-called "Constantinople Agreement," made it clear that the British desire to keep Russia from India and the Persian Gulf was even stronger than the desire to prevent Russia from controlling the Turkish straits. Russia, as an ally in the war, demanded formal recognition of her claims to the control of the Straits and Constantinople. Since the Ottoman Empire was the enemy, the British government was ready to concede this Russian demand on condition that the hitherto neutral zone in Iran should be assigned to Britain. Russia agreed.<sup>28</sup> For the British this agreement meant an additional safeguard against the advanced Russian positions in Iran.

The problem of the violation of Iranian neutrality during the first World War can be dealt with briefly. Certainly if the German and Ottoman General Staffs intended to make a thrust toward Central Asia and India through Iranian territory, tsarist Russia and Great Britain can scarcely be blamed for taking precautions against such an action. The situation is described by Harold Nicolson:

It is sufficient to state that in the north the Turks were the

first to cross the Persian border and were at once countered by Russian troops. Our own [British] intervention in the south was provoked by the disturbances and outrages organized by German residents and agents. The enterprise of such men as Wassmuss, Zugmayer, and Niedermayer; the slow stages by which they suborned the Persian gendarmerie (at that time commanded by Swedish officers) and finally created in Fars and Arabistan a state of civil war; the feats of energy, ingenuity and daring which these men performed; constitute some of the most fascinating pages in the history of the minor operations of

ss Harold Nicolson, *Curzon: The Last Phase, a Study in Post-War Diplomacy* (London, 1934), p. 83.